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***Carson Calls Cuts In Care For Veterans "Troubling"
Urges Congress To Fully Fund Veterans Administration***

Washington, D.C. --

Eastern Oklahoma Congressman Brad Carson (D-OK) spoke out in opposition today to the announcement by Veterans Administration Secretary Anthony Principi that health care enrollment will be suspended for some veterans seeking health care.

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced today that the VA will suspend access to care for certain veterans at VA hospitals and medical centers. If a veteran makes over a certain amount of money per year and does not have a service-connected disability, that veteran will not be able to enroll for care at VA hospitals or medical centers through the remainder of 2003.

"How many times are we going to go back on the promise we made to our veterans?" asked Congressman Carson. "The United States Government said to our veterans 'If you go fight to defend the freedoms of the world's greatest democracy, we will take care of you when you get back home'. Unfortunately, this promise has existed more in rhetoric than in reality."

"I find this decision especially troubling coming on the heels of a possible war against Iraq," said Congressman Carson. "We are potentially going to be sending troops into battle who have little assurance about the quality of health care they will receive from the Veterans Administration when they return. I urge my colleagues in the United States Congress to pass a budget that sends a clear, concise message to our veterans that we will make good on our promise."

The income bracket blocked from enrollment is called "Priority Category 8". Category 8 veterans have the highest incomes, determined according to both the veteran's location within the country and the size of his or her household. Any Category 8 veterans already enrolled for treatment at a hospital or medical center will not be affected by this change. Only Category 8 veterans who would be enrolling during 2003 will be blocked.

“Although the Department of Veterans Affairs has serious funding problems that must be addressed, blocking access to health care for our nation’s veterans who have been promised this benefit is both unfair and unwise,” said Congressman Carson. “The money saved is not worth this failure to service our veterans. I will work with my colleagues in Congress to find a workable solution to the VA funding crisis that maintains care for all veterans in need of it.”

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